

**Remarks of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs
“The July Summit and Beyond: Prospects for U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Reductions”
June 24, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary of State Clinton has stated that renegotiating the START agreement with Russia before its expiration in December is the Administration’s “highest priority.”

This self-imposed urgency places the U.S. at a significant disadvantage going into the negotiations, as it is certain to be interpreted by Russia’s leaders as a willingness by the United States to make significant concessions to reach a deal.

Moscow’s highest priority is to place limits on our missile defense programs.

A second objective is to impose significant restrictions on key conventional capabilities, such as our non-nuclear cruise missiles launched from submarines.

Experts on Russian behavior and Russian policies point to the frequent statements from Russian leaders that they are pleased with the progress to date in the closed negotiations as an indication that Russia is making headway in securing concessions from the U.S. on these and many other important issues.

The U.S. has already indicated that our planned deployment of ground-based missile defense components in Europe is on the table.

But a retreat on missile defense in Europe would set a dangerous precedent for similar restrictions worldwide and would ensure that the American people remain vulnerable to nuclear ambitions by others.

In fact, North Korea is believed to be planning to launch its next missile at Hawaii.

This possibility is regarded by the Pentagon as sufficiently serious that Secretary Gates has quickly beefed up our missile defenses there.

This retreat from European missile defense would also put our forces abroad, and other critical allies such as Israel and Japan, in peril from countries such as Iran

and North Korea, whose increasingly capable missiles are being prepared to carry nuclear and other unconventional weapons payloads.

“Arms control for arms control sake” is what appears to be guiding these negotiations, and it simply does not work.

As Ronald Reagan demonstrated, it is only when the U.S. negotiates from a position of strength that true reductions in the weapons that actually threaten us are possible.

Protecting our population from destruction is a strength, not a weakness, and it should not be negotiated away for a piece of paper filled with Russian “promises.”

The Russians know that our deployment in Europe of defenses against Iranian missiles cannot be used against them.

It is a phony argument that they are using to demonstrate to their former subject nations in Central and Eastern Europe that Moscow still exercises a veto over their foreign policies and security measures.

As for the unnecessary limits on our conventional weapons systems, such as cruise missiles and bombers, Moscow is claiming that because these could be used to deliver nuclear weapons, even though they have never been configured for that purpose, they must be limited.

This is absurd, and we would be foolish to accept this limitation on our conventional capabilities worldwide.

There is yet another consideration that needs to be raised, namely what the new limits on the U.S. strategic arsenal under a binding treaty with Russia might mean for our security in the future, if China decides to deploy a vastly expanded strategic arsenal.

There are some who say that the U.S. does not need to be concerned about this scenario.

After all, they say, China has a very small number of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

But as the Department of Defense and others have warned, China is steadily building, testing and deploying a strategic missile force and laying the foundation for a major build-up in the future.

Given the opaque nature of Chinese military planning and operations, there can be no guarantee that Beijing will not choose to directly challenge us.

It has already built a massive missile force aimed at Taiwan that not only poses an increasing threat to that island but also to the U.S. military forces pledged to its defense.

I will soon be introducing a resolution that calls on the President to ensure that any agreement with Russia on strategic arms does not leave us unable to defend ourselves against a strategic build-up by China or any other country.

I also recently introduced H. Res. 319 expressing strong support for our continued missile defense efforts in Europe.

I know that concerns about conceding to Russia on missile defense has been at the heart of discussions in the Armed Services committee, particularly during committee consideration of the Defense Authorization bill that is on the House Floor this week.

I would like to state my strong support for an amendment that is being offered by Mr. Turner to prevent funding for the implementation of any reductions in our strategic nuclear forces that may result from a treaty between the U.S. and Russia unless the President certifies that the treaty does not place any limits on our missile defense systems.

This amendment has bipartisan support on the Armed Services Committee, and I strongly urge my colleagues on this Committee to vote for this amendment and thereby ensure that the American people are not forced to live under threat of nuclear attack.

This amendment is at the heart of our hearing today: Why is the U.S. prepared to trade our defenses based on the promise of potential Russian cooperation on other issues?

This is the question I pose to our witnesses today for, as it currently stands, it appears the U.S. has learned nothing from Russian duplicity and from its ongoing activities that threaten vital U.S. security interests and allies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.